

The social, political and economic transformative impact of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme on the lives of women farmers in Goromonzi and Vungu-Gweru Districts of Zimbabwe

This is the field work report summary for a project which is being implemented in Zimbabwe under the regional project ‘Securing Women’s Access to Land: Linking Research and Action’ which aims to learn from women and their lived-experiences at the grass roots, and to respond to their needs through action research. The Zimbabwean project is being implemented by the Women Farmers Land and Agriculture Trust, in collaboration with the University of Zimbabwe Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS). The main purpose of the research is to generate knowledge about the linkages between access, rights, and security, and barriers to access land and productivity faced by women beneficiaries of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme so as to identify opportunities arising for economic, social and political empowerment of women farmers, and to draw conclusions that can contribute to the wider dialogue on securing women’s access and rights to land.

How women accessed land

Women’s access to land was a process, starting with spontaneous land invasions or occupations which became known as ‘*Jambanja*’, followed by the official Fast Track Land Reform Programme, where access to land was regulated through application procedures. Some women went on to access land under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and their experiences are recorded below. The research, as well as previous literature, indicates that a significant number of women who took part in the *jambanja* did not access land. The pattern of access to land by women who participated in *jambanja* varies greatly throughout the country and reasons for failure to access land under the subsequent Land Reform Programme are many and complex, meriting further research. However, there are cases where everyone who participated in *jambanja* were resettled. This research focused on women who accessed land by formally applying for the Fast Track Land Reform Programme for land. These women were allocated plots of land by the authorities, either through the District Administrator or the Ministry of Lands, depending on the type of resettlement. The research analysed the allocating processes and authorities, as well as resettlement patterns under the Fast Track Land Reform Programme, including details of the resettlement model, land size, and date of access to the land. Women’s narratives illustrate the difficult process of access, characterised by perseverance, determination and often conflict. A case study shows the on-going and dynamic nature of access, together with its associated problems of insecurity of tenure and conflict. It also shows that informal *jambanja* and the official process of resettlement are interconnected.

Box 1: Susan’s story of determination, hard work and conflict

I am a 60 year old women farmer. I have an A1 farm and the user permit is in my name. On June 15, 2002 as a group we invaded a farm and on June 20, 2002 we were officially allocated pieces of land on the farm that we had invaded. The allocation process was by way of picking a piece of paper from a ha which had numbers on it. The number that one picked was the number of the plot you would be allocated. That same day we selected our Committee of Seven which acts as the village level authority as well as the development committee. I took an axe that day and went and built a shelter from tree branches (kutema musasa) on my plot. I went back home and brought a pot and a blanket, from that day I have not left the plot. Sometimes the white farmer would come and threaten us to leave the farm as we suspected that he was conniving with the then District Administrator, at one time in circumstance which we did not understand, he gave the land back to the white farmer. The District Administrator told us if we did not want to leave we were going to be arrested. I was so angry that day I messed my pants. The white farmer did not stop there as he would let his cattle destroy our maize crops. I thought enough was enough and I confronted the farmer and told him I wanted my maize that his cattle had destroyed. The

white farmer ended up buying me two 50kgs of fertilizer and 25kgs of maize seed as compensation'

Land Utilisation

Although the research did not involve a production survey, some indication of production levels amongst the women farmers was obtained. In all cases, there is a gradual, but marked increase of production over time. It was also observed that most of the women farmers were not utilising the land optimally. The reasons given and those observed for low utilisation of land were lack of/access to inputs, access to drought power hence they ended up cropping late, shortage of skilled labour and extension services.

Constraints to production

The majority of the women farmers are experiencing viability problems as most of the A2 women farmers interviewed in both Districts were not commercially viable, few if any, realised profits; at most access to land has enhanced food security for their families. There is a common misconception that all farmers are men which affects women farmers negatively when it comes to government support programmes.

1. Lack of farming equipment

Most of the women farmers' interviewed do not have tractors and have to rely on ox or donkey drawn ploughs. Some hire tractors, either from the District Development Fund or privately from other farmers, this depends on the availability of funds.

In 2007 the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on a mechanisation project which was managed by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to distribute farm equipment, including tractors, harrows, planters, hoes and other equipment to newly resettled farmers. The programme was ad hoc, insensitive to gender, distribution was not systematic and the criteria for entitlement unclear. As a result, most women farmers did not get access to equipment, which negatively impacted upon their productivity.

Several women indicated that a tractor would make a significant difference to increasing production. One woman pointed out that *'it takes five days to plough (with an animal-drawn plough) a field which would take only a few hours with a tractor. The donkeys that we have are slow and very stubborn; this is a major challenge to our farming activities'*.

Asked what in their opinion could be the reason for them failing to access the equipment, women farmers gave varied reasons such as; corruption (*"we are not financially empowered to give kickbacks"*) general misconception that a farmer is a man (*"we believe that were segregated because of gender"*), and culture and tradition (*"we are not recognised as women farmers, they do not take us seriously"*).

2. Lack of inputs: seeds and fertiliser

In the last few years, both seed and fertiliser have been difficult to procure, either because they were not available or due to prohibitive prices. In particular, the women complained that fertiliser is very expensive. They had compared the cost in Zimbabwe with other countries and found that the cost of one bag of seeds was almost five times more than in neighbouring countries. The women pointed out that it was actually cheaper to buy maize from South Africa than to grow it in Zimbabwe.

3. Problems with labour

Labour is in short supply or expensive. Ex-commercial farm workers are employed on a temporary basis. Weeding is the most labour-intensive farming activity. For those who have the knowledge, they did not have the money as there was a time in the country when there was a shortage of money in the banks. This was due to the hyper inflationary environment that the country has been facing over the past years.

4. Lack of water for irrigation

Vungu-Gweru is in an agro-ecological region deemed unsuitable for rain-fed agriculture. Rainfall patterns are erratic even in Goromonzi District which has relatively higher rainfall. Because of climate change, rainfall patterns have shifted and become unpredictable and unreliable. All women farmers in the study relied on rain-fed agriculture and none had working irrigation on their farm plots, though some had non-functional irrigation equipment or boreholes without pumps. The unavailability of irrigation negates the land reform program, in particular, the access to land by women and increased food security. For farming to be viable, one needs to cultivate throughout the year, not just in the rainy season.

5. Problems with marketing

The women farmers in Goromonzi lamented that the marketing of their crops was very frustrating as prices for produce were low, while inputs were expensive. The money received from the produce is less than the cost of inputs. They cited that in the current situation, 4 tonnes of maize were needed to buy inputs for 1 ha, while their yield per ha, well below 4 tonnes, is more like 1-1.5 tonnes.

Key Policy Recommendations

Develop a policy framework that recognises women as a marginalised group when it comes to inputs and other related farming resources.

Providing a 'gender desk' in the government offices as suggested by the women farmers

Research gaps or further research entry points

1. More investigation into what happened to those women who did not access land.
2. Carry out more research to validate the findings from this small sample so as to determine whether this is a representative of a wider picture. The findings indicate that although state rhetoric is generally progressive and gender sensitive, the situation on the ground is more complex and women continue to be losers, victims of patriarchal attitudes.

Capacity building

More training for women farmers, in various aspects of farm management such as planting regimes, crop rotations, storage facilities, costing and pricing, equipment maintenance labour management, product marketing.

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